

# **You mean you have to use your hands. That's like a baby's toy!**

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

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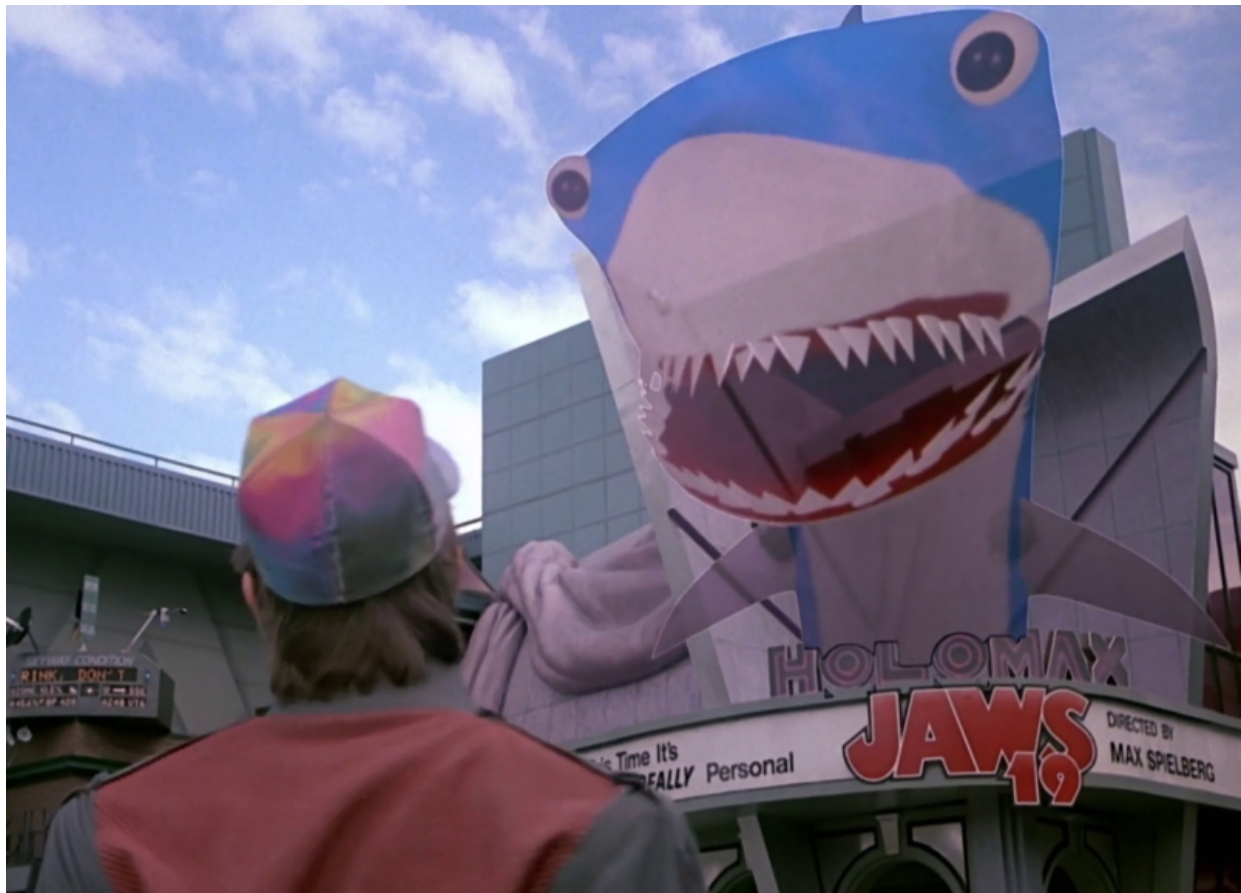
When we took a retrospective look forwards at Back to the Future III next week I drew attention to how much effort had been put into the manual, while the game is... kind of *heavy* on the man-ooooor (I *hate* manure).

Well, with Back to the Future II, I couldn't help feeling that I'd visited Groundhog Day in my deja-vu-mobile, or would do soon. Tomorrow perhaps.

In other words, former Amiga journalist, Gary Whitta, was also responsible for the Back to the Future II manual (and did a great job putting us in the picture/explaining the levels), whilst Imageworks' game itself is a bit, erm... not brilliant.



Movie 2 in the trilogy is somewhat of an oddity; a hodgepodge of old and new plot, tiresomely drawn-out story arc elements that don't deserve the screen time, actors playing multiple parts (male and female and at different ages) and *new* actors replacing existing characters due to contractual quibbles or personal circumstances. On the surface, it feels more convoluted than it really is due to the bizarrely jarring casting decisions which make it difficult to suspend our disbelief in Hill Valley logic. With the exception of Granny McFly (Lea Thompson), all the immediate McFly family were played by Michael J Fox. No, really. We shouldn't be wasting this much processing time thinking about make-up, prosthetics, and the dynamics of VistaGlide special effects! Not upon its inaugural viewing anyway. Shark still looks fake.



All of which explains why the consensus of opinion leans towards Back to the Future II being certified as the worst movie in the franchise. Still, when the series as a whole sails this close to being the greatest movie trilogy of all time it's hard to believe it's possible to actively dislike any of the trifecta's constituent parts.

Regardless of any shortcomings, there's a lot to love. Above all, Michael J Fox and Christopher Lloyd are on top form again. Plus it's an endlessly inventive Easter egg spotter's dream, and perfect for sparking endless philosophical sci-fi debates.



Rather than clanging alarm bells, even the copious product placement feels appropriate in that it connects our world with Hill Valley. Watching it now all these years later, nothing can transport us back to the '80s quite so succinctly as a no. 1 hit by Michael Jackson. At the time Marty's nostalgia for the period - facilitated by gawping through the window of a futuristic antique shop - wouldn't have meant much.





Now, witnessing 1989 Marty sharing our 2019 sentimentality is surreal. As is witnessing Elijah 'video game boy' Wood's movie acting debut, aged 8. He was a 'Wild Gunman' even back then!



Marty McFly: Where are we? When are we?

Doc: We're descending toward Hill Valley, California, at 4:29 pm, on Wednesday, October 21st, 2015.

Marty McFly: 2015? You mean we're in the future?

Jennifer: Future? Marty, what do you mean? How can we be in the future?

Marty McFly: Uh, Jennifer, um, I don't know how to tell you this, but I... you're in a time machine.

Jennifer: And this is the year '2015'?

Doc: October 21st, 2015.



Back to the Future II being the one in which Doc, Marty and a mostly comatosed Jennifer visit the year 2015, it features hoverboards, flying cars, and hundreds of predictions as to what technological developments might transpire over the next 30 years. Many of these were deliberate jokes (the ones revolving around fashion especially), others actually came true. Voice-activated technology for instance.

Curiously there are no references to mobile phone technology, or swipe to un... swipe to un... swipe to un...



swipe to un... Why won't you unlock for crying out loud?  
Sorry I got sidetracked. Maybe that's just me.

It's the movie that keeps on giving - in the year 3000 we'll look back at those archaic floating vehicles, holographic shark, self-fitting jackets and self-fastening trainers and laugh at how under-evolved Bob Gale and Robert Zemeckis' visions of the future were.

Let's all meet up in the year 3000. Won't it be strange when we're all fully grown.





As the most irritating, uninteresting character in the trilogy it's frustrating that the entire premise of the second movie revolves around Biff. He's a one-dimensional buffoon obsessed with travelling back in time armed with a statistical almanack documenting all the results of major sporting events taking place between 1950 and 2000. Obviously his odious scheme entails placing bets on their outcome, winning a fortune and proceeding to become the richest, most powerful tyrant in history. Living a life of luxury in a palatial skyscraper possessing no apparent talent that would explain his exponential rise to fame numerous parallels are drawn to Donald Trump.

Marty McFly: What about the police, Biff? They're gonna match up the bullet with that gun.

Biff Tannen: Kid, I own the police! Besides, they couldn't match up the bullet that killed your old man.

Marty McFly: You son of a...

(Biff cocks the gun)

Biff Tannen: I suppose it's poetic justice - two McFlies with the same gun.

In this alternative 1985 Biff is married to Marty's mum Lorraine against her will, his dad George is long dead (shot by Biff on March 15th 1973), and yet Biff is considered "America's greatest living folk hero" (according to his own museum promo biography anyway). Beware the Ides of March!

Armed military squads police the derelict neighbourhood, Marty's wimpy son Junior is bullied incessantly by his callous stepdad (yes, still talking about Biff), and Doc has been committed to an insane asylum. And in a roundabout sort of

way, it's all Marty's fault. Had he not inadvertently planted the gambling idea in Biff's unimaginative empty head when visiting 2015 to prevent his son and daughter Marlene ending up in jail, Doc and Marty could have quickly solved that dilemma (as they do) and scooted back to 1985 to live happily ever after.

Marty McFly: The almanac. Son of a bitch stole my idea! He must have been listening when I- It's my fault! The whole thing is my fault. If I hadn't bought that damn book, none of this would have ever happened.

Doc: Well, that's all in the past.

Marty McFly: You mean the future.

Doc: Whatever! It demonstrates precisely how time travel can be mis-used, and why the time machine must be destroyed, after we straighten all of this out.



And it's all downhill from there. You see, Biff's grandson Griff turned out to be equally as despicable; he's a loose cannon lunatic who plans to rob the Hill Valley bank and intends to rope in Marty Junior as an accomplice. In the unaltered timeline prior to Marty's arrival, Junior goes to jail and Marlene lands herself in hot water too by busting him out.

Apparently, events so exceptional in 2015 they find their way onto the front page of USA Today. Slow news day?

Marty McFly: (Reading the newspaper from 2015) "Within two hours of his arrest, Martin McFly Jr. was tried, convicted and sentenced to fifteen years in the state penitentiary."? Within two hours?

Doc: The justice system works swiftly in the future now that they've abolished all lawyers.

Marty McFly: This is heavy.

Doc: Oh it gets worse. Next week your daughter tries to break him out and she gets sent up for 20 years.

With that catastrophe averted Doc and Marty schlep it all the way back to 1955, revisiting many of the same events from the first movie to prevent young Biff from using the sports almanack given to him by granddad Biff.





Marty McFly: Oh, this is heavy, Doc. I mean, it's like I was just here yesterday.

Doc: You *were* here yesterday, Marty.

This is made all the more complicated by the necessity to avoid bumping into alternative timeline incarnations of themselves since that can lead to insanity, a cataclysmic rip

in the gubbins of the space-time continuum, or fainting at the very least. Incidentally, this was the inspiration for the second level of the game developed by Images Software published in 1990; a top-down puzzle affair in which you must help to guide Jennifer safely out of her future home. It's reminiscent of the hospital escape mini-game featured in *It Came From the Desert* by Cinemaware, published a year earlier.



*Young Jennifer: I'm old! Old Jennifer: I'm young!*

Having been zapped by Doc's instant anaesthetic device and stowed in a shifty-looking alleyway littered with disc-trash for safe (?) keeping, Jennifer is discovered by two beat cops and returned to the home she's too young to recognise. Because her enduring thumbprint identifies her as 47-year-old Jennifer McFly (now married) she is assumed to be the same person, the cops guessing she's had plastic surgery. Jonathan Rosenbaum of the *Chicago Reader* accused the producers of

revelling in "rampant misogyny". Sidelining Jennifer's character accounts for much of this.



When Jennifer awakens surrounded by her future kids (inc. Michael J Fox dressed as Marty's daughter!), hubby and older self she realises this is bad news and attempts to escape ASAP. In the game you assist Jennifer by opening and closing doors in sequence to chaperone the family around the house, allowing her to evacuate unseen. We don't control any of them directly, only the doors, and the hardest part of the

challenge is recognising who's who. Given that the graphics are so primitive and only seen from a bird's eye view they just look like tiny anonymous Lego heads and shoulders.



Doc: They're taking her home, to your future home! We'll arrive shortly thereafter, get her out of there and go back to 1985.

Marty McFly: You mean, I'm gonna see where I live? I'm gonna see myself as an old man?

Doc: No, no, no Marty, that could result in a... (gasps)

Doc: Great Scott! Jennifer could conceivably encounter her future self! The consequences of that could be disastrous!





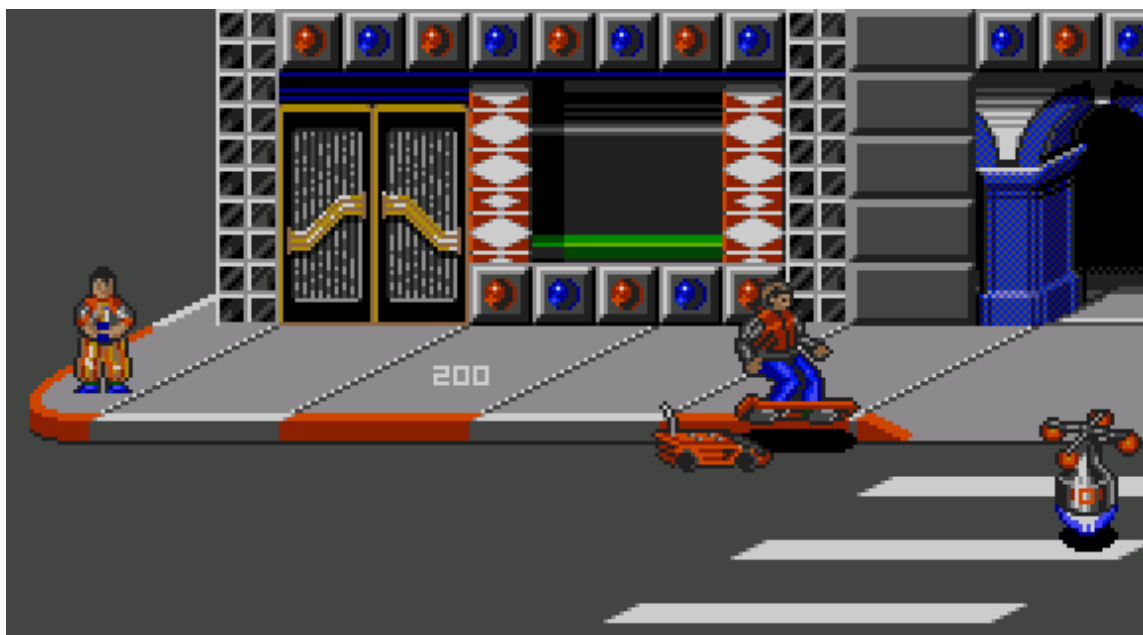
Marty McFly: Doc, what do you mean?

Doc: I foresee two possibilities. One, coming face to face with herself 30 years older would put her into shock and she'd simply pass out. Or two, the encounter could create

a time paradox, the results of which could cause a chain reaction that would unravel the very fabric of the space-time continuum, and destroy the entire universe! Granted, that's a worst-case scenario. The destruction might, in fact, be very localized, limited to merely our own galaxy.

Marty McFly: Well, that's a relief.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves... damn time machine, nothing but trouble. We begin our adventure - likely having purchased the Amiga 500 'Screen Gems' pack - riding Marty's infamous Mattel manufactured hoverboard in a Paperboy style isometric brawler. Check out the remote control cars and bikes for evidence.



Our goal is to fly through Hill Valley to reach the courthouse/clock tower, punching adversaries and leaping over obstacles along the way. In contrast to the movie, Marty's hoverboard even works on water, which is handy since we need to cross the ornamental lake to finish the level. Remember to keep forging ahead, *never* reverse or you'll topple over and lose a life.



If you remember the significance of this scene in the silver screen version you'll know that Marty poses as his son to advise Griff where to stick his offer to make him a bank heist accomplice.



After an altercation in Cafe '80s culminating in a meeting with Griff's little friend, Mr Baseball Bat, Marty flees, 'borrowing' a little girl's hoverboard to make his getaway. His board stalls over the water what with having nothing solid beneath to aid his propulsion (they still need to be pushed manually just like an ordinary skateboard, unless you have



independent power). Regardless Marty manages to out-flank Griff and his posse, sending them hurtling into the town hall, thus derailing their bank robbery ruse. They're still arrested, yet this time for vandalism, and Junior *isn't* implicated.



Nevertheless, there's a long and winding road in-between Marty and saving his cowardly offspring. One stalked by multiple clones of granddad Biff hobbling along with his trademark cane, Griff wielding a telescopic baseball bat, and

Griff's goofball crew. Helping us to stay one step ahead, power-up letters can be snagged for a temporary speed boost or to replenish our energy.



*The game's status bar HUD thingy-me-bob.*

Space-age cars (and Jurassic Park jeeps) also apparently patrol the streets determined to mow us down. At least it's some consolation that they can be used as tow trucks, as in the movie. Let's go surfin' now, everybody's learnin' how. This doesn't serve much purpose, but gee-whizz pops, it sure *is* swell. Sorry, I fell back into '50s mode for a second there.



*Steven Spielberg first became cognizant of Michael Crichton's Jurassic Park novel in October 1989. It was published on 20th November 1990. Back to the Future II hit the theatres on 22nd November 1989. Hmm, that's tight. Probably just a coincidence.*



Oddly, cracks that open up in the road, oil slicks and puddles will disrupt and harm Marty, despite the presumably natural inclination to hover safely over them. Where was the physics consultant when that was implemented? ;)

In other areas, the developers have gone to great lengths to include intricately accurate details from the movie. For example the waste packages of crushed CDs and laser-discs seen littering the streets. There's no room for physical media in 2015... well we're definitely getting there.



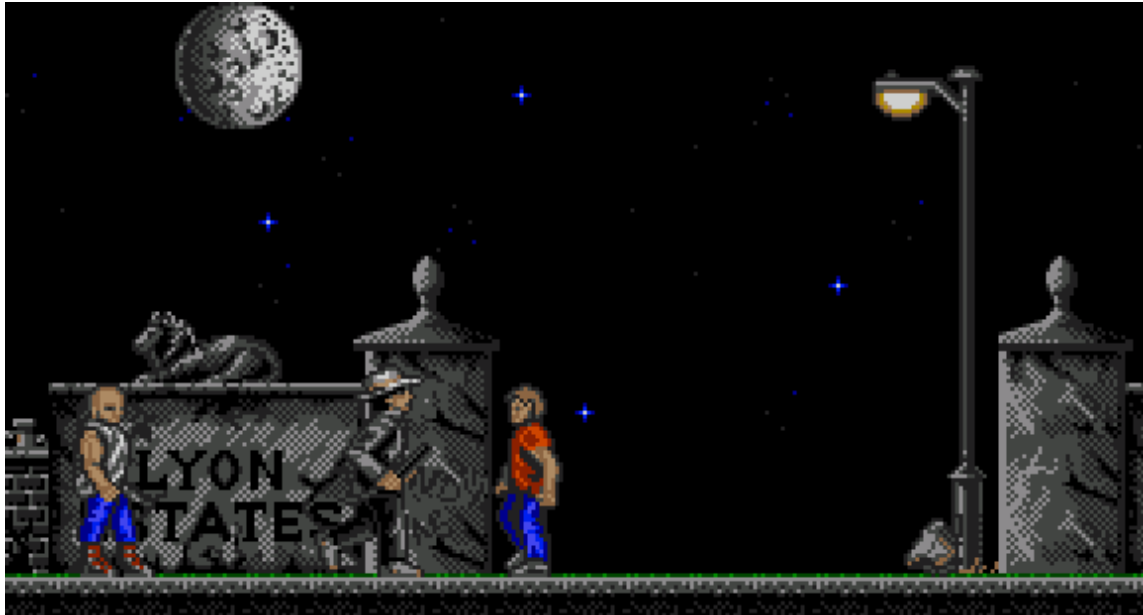
Then there's Jaws 19 directed by Max Spielberg (Steven's son born in 1985), the movie currently showing at the Hill Valley cinema. Unfortunately, there's no game equivalent of the holographic shark, although that would have been far easier to achieve in pixels.



You'll also spot plenty of duplicated product placement and other relevant props... Pepsi Perfect (collected for an energy boost), a Texaco garage, Nike self-lacing shoes, Marty's cap, the sports almanack, plutonium, and so on.



In another genre-flipping gambit level three takes the form of a side-scrolling beat 'em up set in an alternate dystopian 1985.



Thanks to Biff's meddling in 1955 everything has gone to hell in a hand-basket. Delinquent thugs rule the streets and the buildings are dilapidated and adorned with barbed wire. Ideally, the windows should be barred too, but Images must have missed that line from the movie. Instead wrecked cars rot where they crashed and burned, while Donkey Kong barrels bounce blithely by. Biff's Pleasure Paradise Casino is present and correct, as incorrect as that sounds.



It's not rocket science; we must punch and kick our way through Hill Valley to reach the DeLorean guarded by Biff. Once found we jet off to the past to set the world straight again in the future.

Reading our minds with regards to the limited fighting mechanics/manoeuvres on offer, the manual concedes that "You may want more, but remember Marty is not Bruce Lee."

It's a fair point, although it doesn't help to improve the plodding, uninspired gameplay much. It's about as advanced as Night Breed crossed with Yie Ar Kung-Fu. I'm not sure what it has to do with Back to the Future beyond the gloomy backdrop.



Marty McFly: (on walkie-talkie to Doc) Doc! Biff's guys chased me into the gym and their gonna jump... me!

Doc: (on walkie-talkie to Marty) Then get outta there!

Marty McFly: (on walkie-talkie) No, Doc. Not *me*, the *other* me, the one that's up on stage playing 'Johnny B. Goode.'!

Doc: (on walkie-talkie) Great Scott! Your other self will miss the lightning bolt, you won't get back to the future and we'll have a major paradox!

Next on the agenda is a sliding block puzzle depicting an animated interpretation of Marty's musical interlude from Back to the Future (also repeated in Back to the Future part II) in which he plays an ahead of its time classic rock 'n' roll number alongside 'Marvin Berry and The Starlighters'. To a totally bemused audience, it should be noted. Ungrateful, clueless plebs!



As we endure a garbled - though crucially copyright safe - rendition of the Johnny B. Goode track heard at the Enchantment Under the Sea dance in 1955 we must rearrange the pieces to reconstruct the complete picture. A typical time-limited filler stage you'll find in some of the laziest licensed games for the Amiga, only with more squares to shift around. I knew there was "something very familiar about all this".

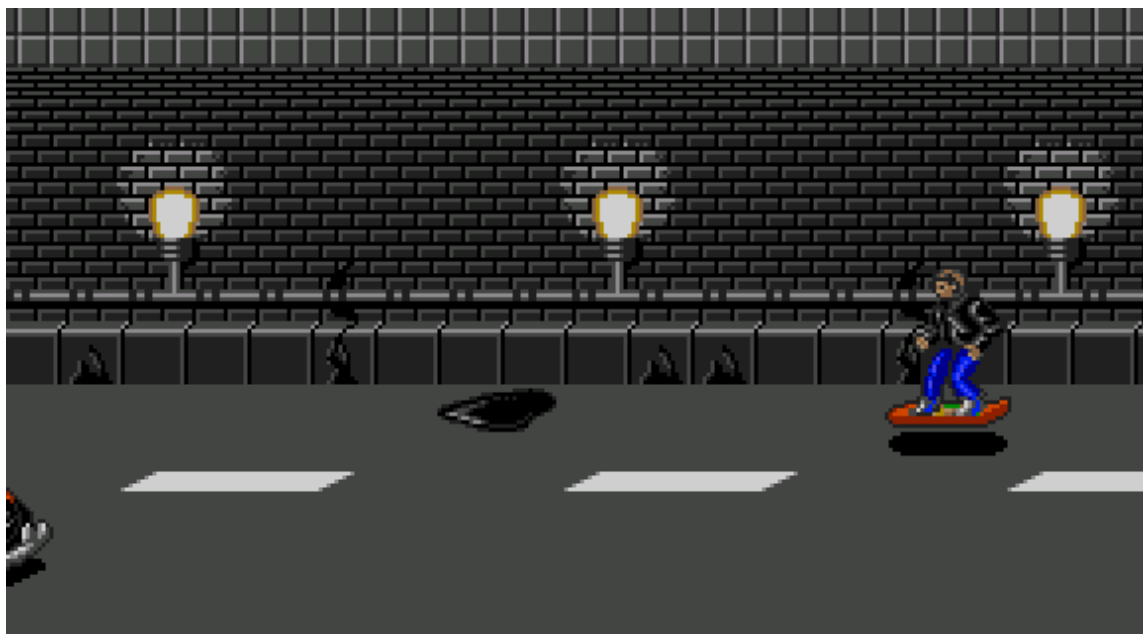
Marty McFly: That's right, Doc. November 12, 1955.

Doc: Unbelievable, that old Biff could have chosen that particular date. It could mean that that point in time inherently contains some sort of cosmic significance. Almost as if it were the temporal junction point for the entire space-time continuum. On the other hand, it could just be an amazing coincidence.

Finally - back on the hoverboard - we must pursue Biff in his pride and joy (a 1946 Ford Super Deluxe convertible christened Sheila) to recover the almanack before he can use it to sabotage the future, one bet at a time. In between, we're obstructed by the police and Biff's henchman who must be punched into submission to clear a path to the chief architect



of the approaching apocalypse himself, Biff. It's pretty much a replica of level one, only with a new backdrop, set in a previous era.



*The same tunnel was used to film the Who Framed Roger Rabbit scene in which Eddie Valiant (Bob Hoskins) drives*

### *Benny the Cab to Toontown.*

Time the final moment right and Biff will careen into the back of a manure truck just as we're whisked to safety on a bunting rope attached to the DeLorean. In fact, he'll do that regardless even if we just stay out of the way, ignoring the DeLorean entirely.

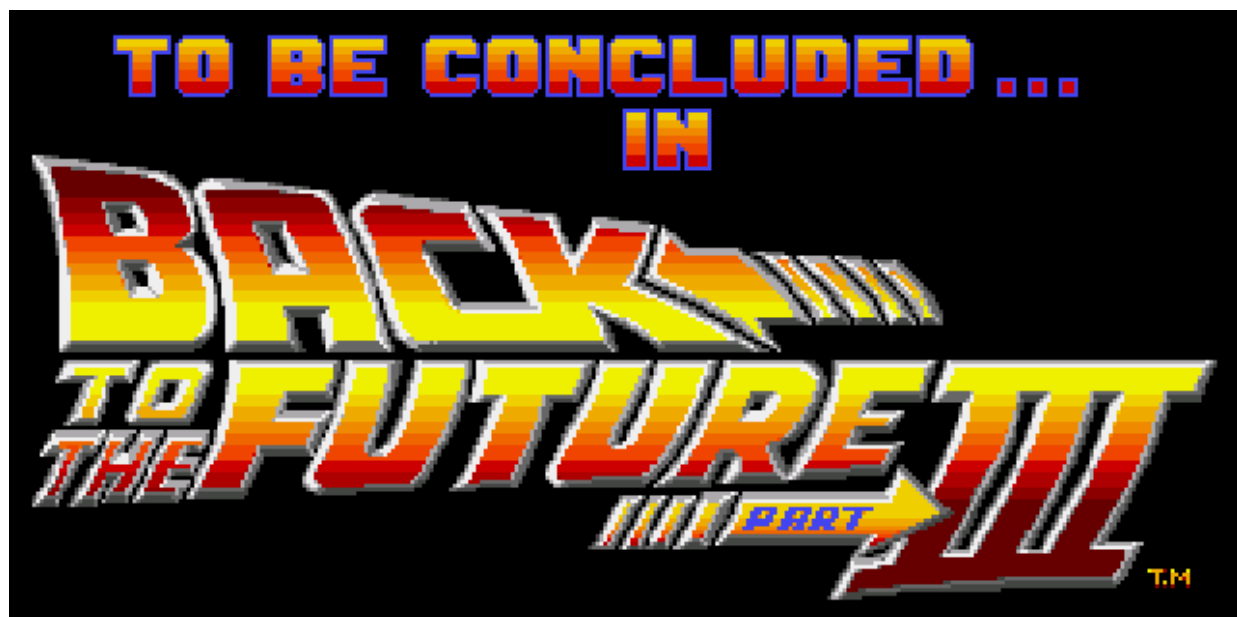


*Actually horse feed pellets, trivia fans. The recurring manure gag is possibly a parody of a similar scene from the 1978 American comedy movie, Harper Valley PTA.*

Cue the now-iconic mission accomplished chords and it's game over. We skip the part where Marty burns the sports almanack to ensure Biff can't abuse it for personal gain (and humanity's loss). Ditto the crucial scene where Western Union deliver Doc's 70-year-old letter written in the old wild west of 1885, neatly teeing up the final instalment of the trilogy.



Much like the end of the movie, there's an abrupt transition into an advert for the next game (seeing as they were filmed/developed back to back), providing Images Software with the perfect excuse to not bother including a proper conclusion. It *would* be a major disappointment had the rest of the extremely poor game not already prepared us for a lacklustre finale.



Barring the very nicely executed animated introduction (featuring the flying DeLorean seen at the end of the first movie/beginning of the second), and the adeptly composed theme tune courtesy of David Whittaker, Back to the Future II the game is a bit of a shambles. Nowhere do we get to actually *drive* the DeLorean, which is a wee smidgen of an oversight given that it's so intrinsically associated with the Back to the Future franchise. Can you imagine the topic coming up on Family Fortunes and no-one mentioning it?





The barely animated cutscenes portraying stilted conversations between Marty and Doc that introduce the upcoming level are amongst the worst I've seen on the Amiga. It's hard to say if James Belushi in Ocean's Red Heat or the time-travelling duo in Back to the Future II should claim the dubious accolade of best ventriloquist dummy impersonation. With only their jaws flapping away incessantly, continuing far beyond the time required to communicate the number of words displayed in text format, they look so wooden it's absurd. We can laugh now... unless of course, you're still stinging from paying £25 for this tat and wish you had a magic DeLorean of your own so you could backtrack to fix your mistake. Then it's "about as funny as a screen door on a battleship".



*D:Ream lied!*

Horrible controls, however, are the major bugbear that renders the game irredeemable. Including the option to switch to mouse operation only exacerbated the problem. When fire doubles up as punch (tap) as well as jump (hold) you can never be certain which of the two functions Marty will perform. It seems to be random potluck, much like the remainder of Marty's range of motions.

In theory, you push up to accelerate, down to brake and use the left and right directions to steer, although this flips whenever the scrolling alters from diagonal to left-right, or vice versa. Then it's right to accelerate, left to brake and up and down to steer, assuming you're facing towards the right. It *kind of* works except moving left and right never really means in a perpendicular fashion as you might expect, due to the isometric perspective. Instead, you slide away at an odd angle more akin to 45 degrees, fostering a slippery, spongy sense of disorientation that fails to dissipate even after extended play.

Marty does *what* he wants, *when* he wants, irrespective of our instructions. Sometimes the two just so happen to align and we get to make some progress. A sad reflection of the game in general I suppose; while it shares the name of the movie that raked in \$332 million at the box office, it seems that the lion's share of the budget was blown on securing the license before a single pixel had been drawn, resulting in yet another 'that'll do' small screen accompaniment.

I *would* suggest keeping your fingers crossed for the sequel in the hope that Imageworks might make amends by compensating our tortuous ordeal with a respectable follow-up, but I've already *reviewed* the future, and it's not pretty. "Nobody calls me chicken!".

